

Testimony of Mark Soboslai, Esq.
Testimony Before
Appropriations Committee
February 23, 2017

Good evening Honorable Senators and Representatives. My name is Mark Soboslai. I am the President of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP.) On behalf of CLRP I am here to testify in relation to Governor's House Bill No. 7027.

In particular, I am here to sound an alarm on behalf of CLRP and the many hundreds of persons living in poverty with serious mental illness who require the services of this extraordinary legal rights project.

Preliminarily and as many of you know CLRP came into existence 25 years ago as the result of a Consent Decree resolving a suit in the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut¹.

Since then, the State's Budget (subsumed under the Appropriations to DMHAS for "Legal Services") has provided funding for CLRP to provide advocacy and legal services for clients facing loss of housing, eviction and potential homelessness.

Between January and September of 2016, CLRP received 1,915 requests for representation and nearly 1,300 of those persons became clients.

¹ That Decree provided that CLRP staff provide legal advocacy and support services for:

"all present and future indigent patients of inpatient facilities funded or operated by the Conn Department of Mental Health who are or will be in need of legal assistance...."

VIRTUALLY EVERY CLIENT REPRESENTED BY CLRP IN A HOUSING RELATED MATTER HAS EITHER MAINTAINED HOUSING OR HAD ACCESS TO HOUSING WHEN THE CASE WAS CLOSED.

The Governor's Budget cuts CLRP's funding to "Consent Decree levels."

This is now a crisis and it is an emergency.

The Governor's Bill completely undermines and effectively destroys CLRP's ability to provide any HOUSING ADVOCACY services on behalf of Connecticut residents who are living in poverty with serious mental illness.

In financial terms, the effect of such cuts is to insure that more people who would otherwise remain out of the hospital in the community in their homes will inevitably require inpatient hospitalization at a significant increase in the cost per client.

From the standpoint of cost effectiveness, this impact is straightforward:

CLRP's cost per case is about \$666 per day.

Whereas, it costs the State \$1,089 per day for inpatient hospitalization;

Inpatient psychiatric treatment costs \$1,189 per day;

And an ER visit costs \$2,152 per day.

Members of the CLRP staff have personally sacrificed their compensation by taking one furlough day per month for the first half of this year to avoid layoffs.

If the Governor's proposed Budget is passed, half of the staff will lose their jobs entirely.

On behalf of the dedicated staff and the clients of CLRP, I truly hope that you will continue your commitment as a vital partner with CLRP to allow these very special lawyers and paralegals to continue assisting our most vulnerable citizens to have a safe and decent place to call home.